
Ahead of tomorrow's World AIDS Day, the World Health Organisation has issued new guidelines for HIV treatment which would significantly increase the number of patients receiving anti-retroviral drugs. Madeleine Morris reports:

At the moment, four million people around the world receive **anti-retroviral drugs**. There's another five million who need them but don't get them.

The WHO recommendations on when to start treatment for HIV would mean **an extra three to five million people would be added to that waiting list**. The WHO wants people who have HIV to start drugs before their immune systems get so weak they start **displaying symptoms**. A study recently published in the medical journal The Lancet showed starting treatment at the newly recommended level could increase survival by nearly 70%.

It would also **add significantly to the cost on** health care systems. In South Africa, **which has one of the biggest HIV burdens in the world**, currently fewer than half of the people who should be receiving HIV drugs get them.

Poor health infrastructure is a common problem for nearly all developing countries. Putting **HIV-positive people** on drugs earlier would significantly reduce the cost to health systems of treating **opportunistic infections** - illnesses which take hold while the immune system is weak. It would also **greatly improve life expectancy of** HIV patients, with **repercussions** for families and the workforce.

The WHO is still working out how much it would cost countries to improve their treatment regimes, but it won't be cheap.

Madeleine Morris, BBC News

Vocabulary and definitions

anti-retroviral drugs	medications for the treatment of infections caused by HIV (short for human immunodeficiency virus) and other retroviruses, i.e. viruses that incorporate their genetic code into host cells resulting in serious, sometimes fatal diseases
an extra three to five million people would be added to that waiting list	three to five more million people infected by HIV would now be considered for treatment (a waiting list is a list of people who are waiting for something that is not available straight away)
displaying symptoms	feeling and/or showing signs of an illness or another disorder (e.g. pain or fever)
add significantly to the cost on	require a lot more money to be given to and spent by
which has one of the biggest HIV burdens in the world	where the number and proportion of HIV infected people is one of the world's highest
HIV-positive people	people who carry HIV but do not necessarily develop AIDS
opportunistic infections	diseases caused by bacteria which occur when someone's immune system, i.e. the body's ability to fight infection, is weakened
greatly improve life expectancy of	give a much better chance of living longer to
repercussions	consequences, results

More on this story: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/8385836.stm>

http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/sexual_health/stis_hivaids.shtml

Read and listen to the story and the vocabulary online:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/wordsinthenews/2009/11/091130_witn_aids.shtml